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ABSTRACT

This case study describes an experienced high school teacher's difficulties in an Alaskan town with severe tensions between Caucasian and Eskimo students and between community members and teachers. This "teaching case" helps preservice teachers understand the complex, ambiguous situations which arise in rural teaching. The limitations of scientific rules and principles are especially obvious in rural Alaska schools. Teachers, typically Caucasian outsiders, must decide whether research-based knowledge derived from mainstream situations applies to small cross-cultural classrooms, and must think through issues related to their role and position in a small, culturally different community. Part I describes a classroom fight between a Caucasian and an Eskimo student which triggered the teacher's realization and analysis of the following school and community problems: (1) consistently lower grades for Native students compared to Caucasians despite apparent parity in standardized test profiles; (2) low self-esteem and motivation among Native students; (3) constant griping by faculty; (4) lack of mutual support among teachers; (5) feelings of powerlessness in principal; (6) poor community self-image; and (7) distrust and bad feelings between community members and teachers. Part II describes the actions the teacher took and their outcomes. This design allows students to read and discuss the problem situation without knowing its resolution. The report discusses the purposes and use of teaching cases, and includes general questions to focus student reflection and discussion, background information on the town and high school, and information on six motivational factors. (SV)

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MALAISE OF THE SPIRIT:

A CASE STUDY

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Teaching Cases in Cross-Cultural Education
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February 1988

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What is the answer?
In that case, what is the question?

--Gertrude Stein

It is better to know some of the
questions than all of the answers.

--James Thurber

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INTRODUCTION

Malaise of the Spirit describes an experienced teacher's difficulties in a large regional town with severe tensions between the Caucasian and Eskimo students and serious distrust between the teachers and the community. The case describes a fight between a Caucasian and Eskimo student that broke out in the classroom, how the teacher handled it, the teacher's efforts to understand and resolve the fundamental educational problems in this situation, and what finally happened.

Malaise of the Spirit is not simply a narrative, one teacher's story. Nor is it an ethnographic case study, a rich and careful description of a cultural scene.

This story is a "teaching case." It is a description of events written to help students understand the complex, ambiguous situations which arise in rural teaching. Teaching cases have long been a cornerstone of professional preparation in schools of business and law. Only recently has the field of education begun to explore their value in the preparation of teachers (Doyle, 1986; Shulman, 1987; McCarthy, 1987). In the teaching case, interpretations are left open and loose ends are not tied up. Relevant information is not known, and known information is not always relevant. The teaching case lets red herrings swim and demands speculation from inadequate knowledge. The purpose of the case is not to establish "truth" but to prepare students for "wise action" (Christensen, 1987). Professional practice demands wise action, even where the truth is not known.

Purposes of Teaching Cases

Teaching cases are useful when the purpose of instruction is not to communicate facts, information, rules, and fixed principles but rather to develop "qualities of mind (curiosity, judgment, wisdom), qualities of person (character, sensitivity, integrity, responsibility), and the ability to apply general concepts and knowledge to specific situations" (Christensen, 1987).

As Donald Schon (1983) observes, professionals often practice in situations which demand more than the application of technical knowledge to concrete problems. Professionals typically work in situations of complexity, ambiguity, and disorder where it is not clear what goals are desirable or where desirable goals may conflict. The professional's task is not simply to solve particular problems through the application of technical knowledge. The task is also to figure out just what the problems are. Preparation for professional practice should include preparation in spotting issues and framing problems, in thinking through the consequences and risks of different courses of action, and in staying sensitive to the particulars of concrete situations.

In the field of education, the very success of recent efforts to identify a "scientific basis for teaching" -- research-based technical knowledge that teachers can apply to children and classrooms -- has brought to light the inherent limitations of scientific knowledge in resolving the subtle dilemmas of classroom life. The rules and principles derived from educational research are useful, but the technical knowledge that can be gleaned from scientific research will always be too limited and too general to encompass classroom life.

The limitations of scientific rules and principles are especially obvious in rural Alaska schools -- where teachers who are typically Caucasian instruct children from Eskimo or Indian communities. Not only must teachers decide whether research-based knowledge derived from mainstream educational situations applies to small cross-cultural classrooms. They must also think through a myriad of teaching issues beyond the classroom -- how they should live their lives in a small, culturally different community, to what extent they should participate in community affairs, how they should respond to various community factions, to what extent they should accept or attempt to alter the situations in which they find themselves.

Teaching well in small Eskimo and Indian communities requires far more than learning a body of cultural knowledge in addition to pedagogical knowledge. Anthropological research concerning Eskimo and Indian communities is similarly over-generalized, fragmentary and inexact. Rural communities, even within the same cultural region, are different from each other, and communities are changing in unpredictable ways. Different generations and particular families within the same community have different beliefs, expectations, values, and styles of communication. Teachers can expect no rules or recipes. They must learn from the situation.

A major purpose of these teaching cases is to develop students' sensitivity to the situation -- to the ambiguities and multiple realities of village teaching. We want students to feel more comfortable with uncertainty. We want them to think about other people's interpretations of a situation. We want to enlarge their repertoire of potential strategies for dealing with problems. We want them to be better able to anticipate the ramifications and risks of the actions they may choose.

Teaching cases not only help to develop cognitive capacities -- judgment and insight. The cases also offer emotional preparation for dealing with an unjust and uncertain world. Young teachers typically expect a just world, a world in which good teaching is always rewarded and good teachers do not bear the legacy of a past they did not create. The cases help students become aware that these expectations are not entirely reasonable and that people like themselves can become caught in circumstances not of their making.

Representativeness of Teaching Cases and the Author's Point-of-View

Malaise of the Spirit is one of a series of teaching cases written for education students by teachers who have observed or participated in the events they describe. This case was NOT selected because it is "representative" of teaching situations in rural Alaska. It was selected because it presented in a concrete and dramatic way an especially difficult teaching situation that students would benefit from reflecting upon.

The author of this case tells the story in the first person from his own perspective. To preserve confidentiality, he has disguised the identity of particular individuals and the particular community.

In preparing these cases, we have wrestled with the vexing issue of point-of-view. The author writes the story from the perspective of a teacher in the school. While the author attempts to provide other viewpoints, he, like all of us, is imprisoned in his own skin. Students should discuss directly the limitations of the author's perspective and how these events might appear to other participants in the situation. Students should keep in mind that they, too, will have a similarly limited view of events. The case mirrors the reality that they will encounter in rural teaching.

Questions To Focus Discussion of a Case

Teaching cases such as this one are intended to develop students' abilities to 1) spot issues and frame problems in an ambiguous, complex teaching situation, 2) interpret the situation from different perspectives, 3) identify crucial decision-points and possibilities for action, and 4) recognize the possible consequences of alternative actions. In stimulating such reflection, we have found useful the following general kinds of questions. Most have been culled from the Instructor's Guide to Teaching and the Case Method (Christensen, Hansen, and Moore, 1987) and from discussions about case method teaching (Christensen, 1987).

These questions are:

1. What are the central issues in this situation? Which are most urgent? Which are most critical?

2. What, if anything, should anyone do? Who? When? How? Why do you think so?

3. What did the teacher actually do? With what results? At what risk? With what potential long-term consequences?

4. How does this situation appear to other participants -- such as the students, superintendent, parents, village council? Why do you think so?

5. How did this situation develop? What, if anything, might alter the basic conditions which created the present difficulties?

6. What, if anything, have you learned from this case?

In teaching a case, we typically ask students to prepare for class discussion by writing a two-page paper a) outlining what they see as the main issues in the situation, b) describing the actions the teacher took, and c) appraising the teacher's actions. We begin the class by asking each student to identify the most important issues of the case and we list the issues on the chalkboard. We choose as a starting point for discussion an issue many students have identified as key to understanding the case. After the case discussion, we ask students to write another short paper on what they now see as the fundamental issues of the case, what actions they would have advised the teacher to take, and what they have learned or come to appreciate as a result of the case discussion.

Issues Raised in Malaise of the Spirit

Since an important goal of case discussion is to develop students' abilities to spot issues, we do not want to identify in this introduction the crucial issues in this case. We point out only that much profitable discussion centers around the issue of racism -- both in the teacher's handling of the fight between the Eskimo and the Caucasian student and in the teacher's methods of assigning grades. Since the teacher leaves at the end of the year, this case is also useful in reflecting on what his contribution actually was.

Malaise of the Spirit is divided into two parts. The first part presents the problems from the teacher's perspective. The second part describes the actions the teacher took to resolve the problems. The case is designed so that students can read and discuss Part I -- the problem situation -- without knowing what the teacher actually did and what happened. The class can then read Part II to test their understanding of the situation. An Appendix includes background material useful in understanding the case.

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PART I: THE CONTEXT AND THE ISSUES

PROBLEMS...

Peter Wedman had figured that it was going to be easy. He had not been, after all, a first-year teacher. Yes, the community of Ruden was new to him, as had been its regional junior-senior high school, but he had four years of successful village teaching behind him. His former principal had told him his "stock was high" in the district office, and the move was within the North Riverside School District. And he had weathered some difficult hours in the past.

For instance, in the village there had been that problem about the break-in. That had been touch and go. The villagers did not like it when he had called in the police; yet, he had shown the proper willingness to forgive, a local value. He had been careful to make sure that the village leaders were apprised of what he was doing, and that he wanted restitution and not revenge. He had even gone so far as to arrange with the District Attorney that restitution payments go to the Village Council for forwarding to him, acknowledging their need to be involved in the settlement. When the transgressor apologized not long after, in turn he offered his hand in friendship.

The people of the village had come to expect the differences he displayed because he was an outsider and a white man. He had tended to be silent, soft-spoken, except in the classroom, and many liked that. His quiet, shy wife who painted beautiful scenes of "old times" and rendered scenes of the village life in pen and ink with care and respect, was genuinely admired. When they left, after four years, their parting was due more to one of those small personality clashes on the staff which somehow only enlarge as the long, winter weeks go on than it was to the physical difficulty of village life, the tiny house in which they had lived, or their inevitable desire for new experiences.

Richard Gill was the name of the teacher with whom Wedman had differed. Gill was a good teacher by several rubrics (his students' test scores, the opinion of colleagues, his students); yet, despite their comparable intelligence and capabilities, Gill felt threatened by Wedman's knowledge and expertise, and he reacted by opposing Wedman's views and criticizing him. After four years, the situation deteriorating, Wedman decided he'd had enough of Gill's needling. He and his wife packed up and chartered two 206's to move their belongings.

And they were much missed by elders and students alike, for they had been part of the village school's better days, days when test scores were high and hopes were high. They had left in local fashion, too: suddenly, and moving not far, only to Ruden, the city and hub of the villages of the Takanakat region. They saw the villagers frequently in the stores that next fall, and always when asked if they were coming back, they replied "maybe" and "I hope so."

But they were not planning on it. Peter had been recognized for his work in the village. Devising a language lab for secondary E.S.L.

students, doing careful diagnostic evaluation and remedial planning for reading students, assisting in curriculum development for language arts, and introducing the word processor to his students were practical instructional accomplishments. The district, acknowledging his efforts, gave him a stipend to attend summer courses in Fairbanks related to the writing project begun in the San Francisco Bay area. Following that, the advocates of the writing project, in developing their own state consortium, invited him to serve as a board member, and the district administrators sent him site to site to present workshops to other teachers. His work with the consortium had brought respect and attention to the district, and that they had one of their teachers serving on the board of the Alaska State Writing Consortium was a feather in their cap. It was for this reason, and for the work he had done for the district's curriculum director, that his village principal told him that he was well thought of by the administration.

And so, now he was in the district's largest school, the central high school at Ruden (see "Background: Ruden and the High School"), and he cannot be faulted too severely for concluding that nothing could possibly go wrong.

But wrong things did go, and after only four months, too. At Christmas break Peter found himself sitting at home, thinking over the past few months, and trying to piece together the clues to what had happened. Had it been all bad? No. So far, Peter had been successful -- at least in some arenas -- but slowly, as the year progressed, he had found himself succumbing to two powerful influences. The first was a growing unhappiness among the students in his English classes, an unhappiness which was caused by the widely disparate entry skills of his students, a disparity which he recognized was cultural and historic in origin but was perceived by his students as racial. An incident had occurred which underscored the significance and urgency of the issue.

Incident #1

Carl's desk, Carl's books and the young Native student himself suddenly exploded in the classroom. With an unintelligible, hoarse, angry imprecation Carl attacked Scott Samson, knocked him out of his seat and down, and began pummeling blindly at the frightened, lanky, white youth beneath him. Wedman, who had had his back turned, moved across his room to the fight in just seconds. The boys in the room backed out of their seats and formed a circle around the two on the carpet, distancing themselves only enough to avoid implication in the fray but not so far that they could not watch. Norma, a senior girl repeating the class because of excessive absenteeism the year before, had leapt up at the moment of the fight and covered her mouth, even as her "Oh my God!" was unconsciously uttered. She, with the other girls in the class, backed up against the chalkboard on the exact opposite side of the room from the fight.

Wedman reached down and put both his arms around Carl's waist and hauled him up and off Scott. Scott had hardly thrown a punch, yet it was Carl whose face struggled to hold back tears. Scott got up and tried to come after Carl, but one or two of his classmates held him back.

"Out!" Wedman ordered. "Everybody out!" He gestured to the door with his head. He held the still struggling Carl pinned against the wall, but he knew Carl would break down in a second and he wanted the others out. Norma seemed to pick up on this and led the girls out quickly.

"Get Scott out of here," Wedman requested, and the boys pulled him back toward the door.

"I didn't do anything," yelled Scott. "You saw it. He started it."

"Out, now!" Wedman reordered. And as they left, looking back, they saw Carl suddenly sag to a desk and then straighten up and then slump as pride and despair competed for control.

"It's all right, Carl. You'll be all right, now. I'll be back in a minute." And Wedman went out and closed the door behind him.

At the end of the hall was the rest of the class.

"Carl jumped him."

"Scott was saying something."

"I didn't. He hit me first."

The white students were standing in a bunch around Scott. No Native student had said a word yet, and they were in a group by themselves further down the hall. They eyed him speculatively. No one had yet implied that the issue was racial, but the apprehension and tension in the hall made it clear what was in everyone's mind.

"Silence, please." Wedman held up his right hand palm outward and made eye contact with his students. "Come here," he gestured. They moved toward him and grouped around him, the Native kids coming slowly and remaining on the perimeter. One or two volunteered to try to explain what had happened, but he silenced them. When the group was quiet he let the silence deepen a moment or two before he spoke.

"Scott, I'd like for you to go to the office --"

"But I didn't --," he complained.

"You are not in trouble," said the tall teacher in his calmest voice, "I just need a quiet place where we can talk. Please go now." He looked straight at Scott and gave him no chance to refuse. "Thank you, Scott." He then returned his gaze to the group, excluding Scott as he moved down the hall.

"We are a very special class," he began, puzzling them with the out of context comment. "We are special for several reasons which I will tell you about at the end of the year. But right now I want you to realize something." Again he paused. "Carl and Scott have been going to school together for...how long now, Norma?" She blinked in surprise at being addressed.

"Uh..."

"-- since third grade," offered one of the white boys. Wedman did not acknowledge the answer and waited for Norma's reply.

"Scott moved here when I was in second. But Carl was in my class then, not Scott's. Since sixth, I think."

"Since sixth," repeated Wedman. "That's a long time to be in the same class, every day, all day long. They must be like brothers by now." He went on giving no one a chance to gainsay him.

"And like brothers in a family, there will be fights. Right now the important thing is how it ends, not how it started. That's all for now. Please go on up to the library. I'll be up in a few minutes." He turned away and headed for his room and Carl.

Carl had picked up the room and his books and was sitting in the desk closest to the door hunkered defensively into his dungaree jacket. He looked up as Wedman came in. "Office?"

"No. I sent Scott there. I'd just as soon you waited here until the bell and then went to your next class."

Carl sat, expecting more.

Wedman grinned suddenly at him, "You were really ticked. Any idea what set you off?"

Carl smiled sheepishly and shrugged. His smile only lasted a split second.

"Well," said Wedman, "as your teacher I suppose I must give you a punishment. You have a special homework assignment: You must write down what it was that made you angry. Get it to me as soon as you can. That's it for now." He added mock gruffly: "Now get out of here -- and try to have a better day."

As Carl left, Wedman took his discipline log and made a few notes to himself. Then he headed for the office and the waiting Scott. The principal met him there.

"What happened?" Sellers asked offhandedly.

"I'm not sure yet, but I don't think you need to get involved unless you want to."

"I'm here if you need me."

Sellers went into his office and Wedman approached the waiting Scott.

"Mr. Wedman, I didn't start anything, how come I'm here? Will my mother have to come up? She told me if I get in trouble --"

"Relax, Scott, I told you before -- you're not in trouble. Are you O.K.?"

"Huh? Oh, well, yeah, sure -- he didn't hurt me."

"Well, good. They must make you Ruden kids out of pretty tough stuff. So -- you have any idea what Carl got so angry about?"

"No. I didn't do anything. I just looked in his writing folder and that's all. No reason to flip out."

"Hmm. That's all, uh? I guess we'd better stay out of Carl's folder from now on. Does Carl keep his quizzes and graded stuff in there?"

"Yeah. That's what ticked him off. He got a D minus on the vocab quiz."

"Did you say anything to him?"

"Nah. I just said 'D minus.' That's all."

"Then he jumped you?"

"Yeah."

"O.K. When the bell rings, Scott, just go to your next class. If you see Carl, you might want to say 'sorry' even though you didn't do anything except mess with his folder, which --" he looked at the apprehensive Scott directly, "-- you knew was wrong. So, live and learn. I'll see you later, Scott."

Before he went home that day, Wedman got a note via Norma from Carl. It read, "I don't like it when he says I'm dumb because I'm Native."

Incident #2

Wedman's second problem was more widespread, extending throughout and perhaps beyond the school. Yet he could not quite put his finger on it. He only knew that both his students and his colleagues seemed somehow disheartened, spiritless, and that day by day he, too, was being forced to

reach deeper and deeper within himself to find the energy he needed to withstand a growing aura of despondency. He knew, too, that he would have to come to grips with it before the year was out, or he would be in risk of more than just having a lackluster first year. His belief in teaching was at risk.

On the first Monday morning in December two very unusual events occurred. Wedman yelled at a colleague, and he went to his classes totally unprepared. The events were not unrelated.

As was their routine, Wedman and Bill Sawyer, the school's band teacher arrived separately well before school, met at the gym, donned their sweats and ran together for three or four miles. On this particular morning, Wedman had elected to take a taxi to the building because of inclement weather. Sawyer teased him about it good naturedly:

"What a jock! You take a cab to your workout!"

Wedman spun on his heel mid-stride. "Bill, you just keep your opinions to yourself! Don't criticize me until you've walked a mile in my shoes -- just one mile!"

Totally taken aback, the veteran Sawyer recognized stress signs and promptly apologized. Wedman picked up the pace and pounded out the remainder of his morning run alone.

The rest of the day was no better. Without lesson plans, Wedman's classes went through the motions of a day, but without the sharp edge of purpose that characterizes a good learning atmosphere.

When David Benson made a comment about the uncontrolled behavior of Art Epstein's classes in the library, criticizing Art (who was not present in the faculty room at the time) for his desultory approach to discipline, Wedman abruptly stood up and walked out of the lunch gathering without a word to anyone.

Minor discipline problems interrupted his classes, and Wedman was on the touchy side throughout the day. Word got around and his last two classes were unusually subdued and wary. Finally one of his seniors, an ebullient girl named Bess Jimmy who did not want to deal with a grumpy teacher, came out with it.

"Like what's wrong with you today? Did you have a bad weekend or something?"

"Off my feed, I guess," he apologized, but she had put her finger on part of the problem. The weekend had been a waste. He slept too late Saturday, not really fatigued -- just not wanting to get up. Saturday afternoon he sat in front of the television. And Saturday evening. Then he did the same thing on Sunday. With mounds of work to do around the house, papers to grade, letters to write, calls to make and lessons to

plan, he did nothing. At one point he got as far as the desk, but instead of working he sat, shoulders slumped, and wondered why he felt so tired.

"I don't feel like doing a thing," he complained to his wife.

"You work hard," she sympathized. "You're entitled to a weekend off. Don't feel guilty."

"I don't," thought the teacher. "I don't feel guilty. I don't feel...anything."

INSIDE THE CLASSROOM

Over the two-week Christmas break, Peter began his problem solving by attempting to take stock of the situation in his English classes. He thought back to the incident involving Carl and Scott. Why did Carl see himself as a "dumb Native"? What was the source of that absurd, racist description? Carl was very resourceful and seemed to catch on quickly. Besides, did Scott actually say anything about Carl's Native origins? No. There were white students who would call Native students "dumb Injun" or "dumb Eski" or the like. In general they were students who could ill afford to call anyone anything, but they did serve to perpetuate the pejoratives, unfortunately. Scott, though, was not like that. Did Scott say anything at all about Carl's intelligence? No. Scott saw one of Carl's grades and Carl erupted. Carl has a perception of himself as being dumb because his grades are low. Does he have a perception of Natives as being dumb because he sees their grades as always being lower than their white classmates? Was there any truth to Carl's generalizations about grades? Again, why did Carl identify himself as a "dumb Native"?

Analyzing the report card grades he had recorded for his students in the first two quarters, he was upset by the pattern. The Native students did consistently have lower grades. Looking closely, he noticed that the Native students who had recently transferred into Ruden from the outlying villages were doing very poorly. Only slightly ahead of them were the Native kids who had moved to Ruden in the past few years. All of this group were E.S.L. students.

Carl Aaron was typical. Carl's mother and father were Yup'ik villagers from nearby Alakatat who had moved to Ruden the year after Carl's younger sister, Lucy, was born. In school, Carl had always managed to get by except once, as a sixth grader, when he was left back because of his poor English skills.

The non-Native language speaking Native students were doing better. Nonetheless, not one student in this group was in the top five of any class. In his gradebook, the top five was a "Whites Only" clique.

"What about MaryAnn?" he wondered. "She's a good student. What happened?" Running his finger across the gradebook he saw that what she

had done had been good work, but that once a week, sometimes twice, she had not turned in a homework assignment at all. Despite the excellence of her work, the omissions took her out of the top five. He checked further and noticed that her pattern was consistent. In class, her work was better and more regularly completed than at home. He also discovered that make-up work was seldom, if ever, completed by most of the same Native students who, like MaryAnn, regularly failed to turn in a homework assignment.

The import of the last observation became apparent when he checked attendance. The same pattern existed. His non-Native students were in class 90% of the time. His Native students missed 20-25% of their classes, with the girls missing an alarming one out of three days. Were they cutting the classes? He thought not. Partly because it was his first year at the new school and partly because he tended to be sloppy about keeping attendance records, he had forced himself to pay strict attention to marking tardies and "excused" and "unexcused" absences. He had one or two students who cut classes and school, but by and large the numerous absences from school of his Native language speaking students were excused by their parents. Strangely, the pattern for tardies (except for first hour) was just the opposite, in that his Native students were hardly ever tardy and the non-Native students oftentimes were. Why was all this happening? He had none of these problems with the kids he taught in the village. They had worked hard, done homework, and produced work that was exemplary.

What else was wrong? Lots. In Wedman's second hour class (the class in which the incident with Carl had taken place) he had the "auto mechs" as he called them. These were the guys who had elected to take a double period of automotive shop class, and by default they took second hour English. They would have preferred to skip English altogether. Most of them were males and most of them were white, and some of them had developed anti-Native prejudices somewhere along the way. They sat together, apart from the Native students (and vice versa). Preceding them was their reputation for drinking and fighting down at the local joints. (Though "dry" by law, Ruden is a very "wet" town because of importation. Bootlegging and drinking among some high school students is a serious problem.) With only one exception their parents were permanent Ruden residents who made their livings working for the city or the local utilities. Peter had made it clear that he would consider the use of racial epithets equivalent to the use of profanity, and that meant disciplinary action.

He had tried, at several points in the fall, to bring out the issues for discussion. Once he had assigned a writing exercise in which the Native students in the class had to write a dialog between two prejudiced white outsiders. The two characters were to walk around Ruden and criticize the Natives based only on what they saw. On the other hand, his white students were to write a dialog between two Native men who took the same walk. He had hoped for some serious thought about each point of view, but what he got was a long list of insults and perjoratives.

Despite the low level of English skills of the entire group, the grades again broke down along the same demographic lines as in the other English classes. It seems as if no matter how poorly the white students did, the Native students came in second. This became puzzlingly evident when Jacob, a junior transfer student from the village of Akoryak, was moved from the second-hour "auto-mech" class to the last hour group. The quality and quantity of Jacob's work went up immediately, but still stopped short of the level Peter thought him capable of and short of the level of Jacob's non-Native peers. Interestingly, the last hour class seated itself in a more heterogeneous fashion, and evidence of any racial conflict was nil. Academically, they were ahead of the "auto mechs." Most of them would go on to college preparatory English in the following year. If they fell out, they tended to break into three groups, not two. The new category comprised the Native kids who could not speak their Native language. Once, early in the year, Peter had spoken in a local dialect to one of his Native students and had embarrassed the girl badly because she could not reply. The Native language speakers in the class got on her case about it. Although he later apologized to her and spent some time with her talking about her feelings, he filed the incident mentally under "Errors Definitely Not to Be Repeated."

Class participation. What about that? He had been told that in the local culture several values were at work which inhibited classroom participation. Guessing is not encouraged. (Peter assumed that this characteristic was related to survival skills. Guessing could prove costly.) Native speakers tend to allow a longer pause between speech and reply. (His garrulous white students barely allowed each other to finish before they commenced speaking.) Native students seldom raise their voices. In English, speaking more loudly is one way of gaining attention. "But I haven't graded off for that," he told himself. "They don't participate as much, but I don't take anything off their averages for that. Still, maybe there is room for improvement there."

Peter asked himself if he was unfairly comparing the written work produced by English speaking students with the work of their less fluent E.S.L. classmates. How did he arrive at a grade for a paper? Isn't grading a paper pretty subjective? Mightn't he be taking off for a short paper, or a paper whose purpose eluded him because of difficulties in language expression, or worse, a paper which seemed pointless to him because he failed to grasp the cultural concepts involved? Was he able to discount the disparity in the number of errors? He had never used a set rubric for evaluating papers in the village school, principally because he had always felt that he had a good sense of the effort involved in writing a paper, and he trusted his instincts concerning the differing abilities of the kids. In the village he had graded on effort, largely, and he knew, after one or two papers, what each student was accustomed to doing. He had been using the same evaluation system in Ruden. Maybe he needed to scrap it.

Did any of these issues even matter? He put it bluntly to himself: His grading was now racist. How could it be? He was sure that he graded

based on motivation, and that his evaluations were based on an individual's ability, not on anything else. Was it possible that his attempts to grade with fairness were just not enough, and that he needed to upset some patterns that had been established which were affecting the motivation of his students? More and more it seemed as if he needed to understand motivation. He recalled having seen some Madeline Hunter stuff from the Alaska Department of Education. "I'll check that out next week." [See Background C: Motivation.]

What other classroom procedures did he regularly make use of that might be causing the disparities in grades? In his vocabulary exercises, which he felt were important, he followed a set routine. On Mondays he introduced the word list -- usually ten words taken from an upcoming reading assignment. He'd assign definitions for homework. The next day he'd go over the definitions orally and provide some sample sentences. Wednesdays, a few minutes were given over to writing sample sentences with volunteers reading theirs aloud. Friday was always quiz day, and he'd call for a definition and a sample sentence for each word.

Reading assignments, in his judgment, he was handling well. He'd give the assignment, usually not more than five pages of reading from the Scott Foresman text, five or ten minutes before the end of the class, sometimes reading aloud to the class until the bell and sometimes permitting silent reading. The rest of the reading he'd ask to have completed for the next day, and he gave quizzes to be sure it was done. Class discussion of key points followed, and from the level of the discussion, he concluded that comprehension was fairly high. He always tried to point out the relevance of concepts presented or to ask students to relate the reading to their own lives. Although the literature selections were governed by the curriculum (American literature to the juniors and English literature to the seniors), he included Native American writings in both classes and related them by theme or content.

He emphasized the importance of writing, and most of each class was given over to working on writing. Each student had a folder with current drafts and copies of completed past work. Also, stapled to the inside cover of the folder was a grammar checklist. He had devised the checklist himself, using an elementary language arts textbook series. [See Background D: Excerpts from Writing Skills Checklist.] He assigned one grammar objective per paper based on the individual progress of the student as recorded on the checklist. He did not grade grammar, however, until the draft was finished and the student had received some feedback on the content from either himself or a peer. Then, when the content had reached final revision, the student turned to the grammar objective. Depending on the difficulty of the objective, the student had to research the topic in a grammar text, ask the teacher for assistance, do a worksheet of examples and then incorporate the new technical skill in the current writing. Proofreading, the final step before publication, was limited to items from the checklist which had already been accomplished in previous papers. As discussed previously, the final evaluation and grading of the writing Wedman had been doing subjectively.

He covered study skills at the beginning of the year, spot checking after that to see that some of the guidelines and suggestions were being followed. He had even gone so far as to get permission from other faculty members to "spot check" his students in their classes for the presence of an assignment pad.

In further researching sources of Carl's "dumb Native" identity, Wedman explored the area of standardized test scores and the role they play in giving students concepts of their abilities. The district had for some years been using the Comprehensive Test Battery Series (C.T.B.S.) of the Macmillan Publishing Company as its own internal yardstick. The test is norm-referenced, and, although not intended for diagnostic use, does provide clues to areas of student weakness. In general, Native students had similar profiles* to non-Native students, except, as might be expected, in Language Expression. Their scores in Language Mechanics were slightly higher, reflecting considerable exposure to meta-language terminology and instruction, and to discrete grammar skills. Grammar is easier to teach than language expression, a more gestalt process.

That the district frequently had village teachers teaching out of their subject areas contributed to this pattern. A social studies teacher for example, assigned to teach high school English, might more readily fall into the pattern of teaching grammar skills rather than work on the students' oral and written expression. Many English teachers admit that they themselves are not comfortable teaching writing, that they prefer teaching literature. Some new teachers are not even aware of the distinction between teaching writing and teaching grammar, and the rural districts are often replete with rookie teachers.

No, there was no doubt in Peter's mind that the profiles of the two groups were very nearly the same. The profiles, yes. The scores, no. Across the battery, the non-Native students were outscoring the Native students. Perhaps all the differences in scores were invalid simply because of test bias. Several questions from the test stood out in his mind as being inappropriate. He remembered a passage which discussed subways, turnstiles and tokens. Even village kids who had been to Anchorage might not know these terms. From his own experience he knew that the non-Native students frequently went Outside, and to them the terms were much more likely to be familiar. So test bias was a possible

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* "Profiles" are the patterns made by the individual scores of a test battery when viewed together. They frequently are similar among similar test populations. "Scores" refer to the individual's achievement on specific test sections.

factor. That and the language difference could easily account for the difference in scores. The test scores seemed to be a red herring. All in all, everything else being equal, the scores showed that the students were all pretty much on a par with each other in ability. In the classroom, though, something else was going on. Carl's English skills were lower than the non-Native students. That was as it should be. But that his grades were lower, and worse, that he felt "dumb" -- that was all wrong.

OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

Where had Wedman's "lost weekend" gone? More to the point, what had happened to his usual energy and willingness to tackle the challenges of teaching? Founded on his belief that what he did mattered, his optimism and hope had never faltered before. Something had wormed its way into his beliefs about the outcome of his efforts.

Clue #1: "A pit!"

Thinking back over the time he had spent in Ruden, Peter realized that the assault on his optimism had begun early; in fact, a conversation he had with a woman he met while waiting for his flight from Anchorage to Ruden was his first clue that all was not well in the community. "You're going to Ruden?" the woman had seemed incredulous. "What for? Why would anyone want to go there? It's such a depressing place. Drunks and garbage and no roads in or out."

Upon pressing the woman for the root of her opinion, the woman confessed that she had never been there. "Oh, everyone knows Ruden's a pit!" she had argued, but Peter had dismissed her comments as provincial snobbery. Later, looking down at the community from the 737 as it circled on approach and seeing the predominantly substandard housing, and then once again riding a cab into the center of town from the airport and seeing the cluttered yards of the small, shabby homes, he recalled the words of the woman at the terminal. "Well, it's only natural," Peter mused to himself. "Ruden hasn't been here long. It's bound to have a raw, unfinished look." And it was true. Ruden had burgeoned from a combination trading post-mission not much larger than an average Alaskan bush village to one of the ten largest communities in the state, and it had accomplished the largest part of that growth in a span of less than fifty years. Peter forgot about the conversation until Christmas week, just as he had pushed the memory of "the griping" to the back of his mind.

With the first few weeks of school behind him, Peter had begun spending more of his noon breaks eating lunch with his colleagues instead of staying in his classroom playing catch-up. He found out quickly that airing complaints seemed to be the principal conversation. Sometimes he hated it. He would come away from the sessions angry, disappointed in his colleagues, and resolved to eat in his room. Other times he felt that it was a healthy and natural outlet for the stress of the job, and that the

griping served a necessary function: assuring each teacher that she or he is not alone in having problems. And, finally, he had to admit to himself that he took part. It bothered him when they would gripe and play "Yes, but"* because he was interested in the problems associated with teaching.

He had often heard the complaint, "If only I could just teach, and not have to..." But for himself, the extraordinary requirements of the job provided another level of challenge that he found satisfying. Sometimes.

One thing there was no doubt about. The noontime gatherings were insightful, and two, in particular, stood out in his memory.

Clue #2: "The Teacher's Lounge"

"Five out of six, did they tell you that, Peter?" began David Benson, the school's librarian. "Five out of the last six years we've been without a contract -- oh, that's right, I forgot. You've been in the North Riverside School District a couple of years, haven't you? What village were you in? No matter, they're all the same. Welcome to the big city."

"David gets a little cynical," offered Jeannie Thompson. "He was on negotiations. It hasn't been easy. 'It's nice to have a new face join us in here' is what he means to say." Jeannie taught junior high social studies.

"Know what the worst is?" David ignored the jibe. "The worst is like this morning. At the store I get into a cab -- you know, the sardine special -- and the driver's talking over his shoulder to this woman next to me, and he's saying how much he hates the rich teachers -- his exact words, 'those rich teachers have it so easy.' So I ask him a few questions. Does he pay rent? Hell, no. He lives in his cousin's house. Does he buy fish? You kidding? He gets 'em from his brother. Does he buy meat? No. He hunts. He has a snowmachine, two cars, a boat, the works. That gets me, so I ask him how much he figures teachers have to pay for all that, and, of course, he clams right up."

Jeannie spoke up again, "The Riverside Gazette publishes our salaries. To many people around here, it seems like a lot of money. They don't understand that we are far from our families, that we travel back and forth each year, that we pay rent."

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* In transactional analysis, the game of "yes, but" occurs when one person presents a problem and then meets proffered solutions with "yes, but" followed by another problem. It is characteristically played by a person who is not actually seeking a solution to the problem, but rather is hoping for sympathy, a different type of need.

"Oh, they understand that all right," said David. "Tell 'em you're a teacher and the price goes up a couple of hundred. 'Teachers can afford it.'"

Marvin, Jeannie's husband and a chemistry teacher, picked up the baton, "It's really not fair, though, the way the paper gets on us. They never go after the F.A.A. people or the hospital group -- they all make twice what we do. It's politics, pure politics. Last year, when we were at impasse, we held a march here in town to bring attention to the fact that the district was not negotiating with us. We made signs and prepared press releases, the whole bit. The next day the headline in the paper read, "Teachers march for money." Can you beat that? Not once, not on one sign, not in one statement did we mention money. We just wanted to get across the point that the district wasn't even negotiating."

Marvin took aim again, "The central office, our own administrators, push that money stuff at the paper. That way, when it's time for negotiations, the school board has a mind set that we make too much. The administration can throw a bunch of numbers at them and fog 'em blind. Meanwhile, where does all the money go? The state has increased the budget year after year after year, and what, what do we have to show for it? A remodeled admin' building. It's been done over four times in the past six years. There are twenty times as many admin' people as when I started working here, twenty times! No exaggeration. The salary of that administration building..." He shook his head.

"Why don't you send the figures to the paper? Why not let the people of Ruden see the other side of the story?" asked Peter.

David laughed sarcastically. "Don't think we haven't tried. This is a small town. Sarah Campbell, the owner-editor of the paper, gets a big, fat check every month for all the ads put in the paper by N.R.S.D. The last thing she's going to do is jeopardize that kind of income. Check it out for yourself. The last issue had six pages of district so-called advertising. Bilingual fun and games page, lunch menus, legal notices, workshops, and have you seen the latest? Now they have a permanent ad in the classified section for secretarial help in that admin' building."

"Meanwhile," went on David, "take a look around this place. It's falling to wrack and ruin. Wait until we lose our accreditation over all the cutbacks -- then watch the heads roll. It'll be too late for a lot of kids by then, though. This used to be a classy joint. We used to have a real teacher's lounge. This place," he gestured around him, "was the old book room. We fixed it up. The association paid for all the furniture and the carpet. When they moved the junior high into this building, though, we lost the lounge. Lounge -- what a joke."

"Lounge. I hate that," interjected Jeannie, "as if we spend our time lounging."

Peter looked around. The furniture, one couch and six small armchairs, was crammed into one half of the room. A coffee table served as the meal table. The other half of the room was given over to two ditto machines and a large Xerox copier, new -- which had come only after persistent lobbying and which Ron maintained had cost them a half-time secretary for a year. The teachers' mailboxes (a plywood grid haphazardly labeled with the names of the faculty) confirmed the room's identity.

David continued, "This school used to be the centerpiece of the district. We had nearly five thousand people in Ruden at the peak of the construction boom. At the same time, the kids were coming here from all over the place. Now we've got umpteen little village high schools, the population is down to twenty-five hundred or so, they've moved the junior high into the high school, and there hasn't been anything new bought around here in eons. We've got twelve computers now -- thanks to the faculty. No kidding. Gene Bladen and Phil Trask and I, we got together and wrote up a grant proposal to get those. Before that we had nothing. Every other school in this district -- hell, you oughta know, coming out of a village. How many computers in that school of yours, Peter?"

"Six, uh, no, eight now."

"For how many students?"

"Maybe thirty, K through twelve."

"And we had none, for three hundred kids, counting the junior high. It's the 'steak and hot dogs thing.'"

"Meaning?"

"That's a term that comes directly from the mouth of one of our district board members. He complained that Ruden always got steak while everyone in the villages was eating hot dogs," answered David.

Jeannie added, "That kind of thinking prevails now. The board members are all villagers; even the one member who is from Ruden doesn't really represent us. He claims that since he is elected 'at-large,' he represents the whole district and cannot function on behalf of 'just Ruden.'"

"Is the issue one of racism?" asked Peter. "Are the board members deliberately under-funding Ruden because the city has a large non-Native population?"

Unfortunately, the bell rang and the question went unanswered for the time being, not without David Benson's adding a cryptic line that Peter was to hear again and again from many quarters, "Ruden's Ruden. You'll understand when you've been here a little longer."

* * *

On another afternoon, sometime in early November, the faculty, gathered once again for lunch, shared two interesting clippings. Jerry Alexander had rediscovered an article in a Parade magazine from 1978 which examined some of the problems faced by teachers. He was reading aloud.

"Listen to this part: 'When it comes to problems, too often the teachers remain quiet...Principals do the same thing. Unless they do, the superintendent asks, 'What's the matter? Can't you control things?'" Jerry looked up and grinned. "Sound familiar? I've heard Ron say that." He went on reading:

"'It isn't just a case of the teacher or the principal or the superintendent who has lost control. We have all lost control -- including the parents.' They quote Senator Bayh here, too. 'It should come as no surprise that the educational institutions which house the vast majority of our youngsters will tend to reflect the societal trends found in the community at large.'"

"I believe that," offered Art Epstein. "My wife and I have been here the longest, and I can remember what this place was like in the late sixties. We had a kid get drunk and freeze to death. We had drinking going on in the school. One of the school staff commited suicide up in the school. There was a lot of criticism of what we as teachers were doing, and criticism that our kids were causing problems in the community. The flip side of that was that the town was also exerting quite an influence on the behavior of the kids."

Jeannie smiled wryly. "It was a period of trial and error. While others tried to figure out what was going on, we were here trying to do something about it. Somehow we managed to get blamed by the community for all the trouble."

"Hasn't all that changed now, though?" asked Peter.

"It's worse. The attitude is worse. Parents think we're incompetent, old, over-the-hill --"

"Money grubbing," interrupted David.

"And money grubbing," agreed Jeannie. "Did you hear about the incident involving the lesson plans?"

"Oh, brother, yes. Tell him that one. He'll be on the afternoon jet out of here." David looked angry beneath the jest.

"We got the word --"

"Ron came and told us."

"Yes, Ron. He told us that as principal he had been asked by the Superintendent to turn in photostated copies of the previous week's lesson plans for his site, that Curriculum was doing a study. So we did. We each photostated our plan books for the week. Well, you know what lesson plans look like after you've taught the same course over and over. They're pretty skimpy. Don doesn't use them at all in shop, and I don't think Ben Rosner puts down anything more than page numbers -- and he probably only does that so that he can tell the kids who missed class what page they were on. And all of us have our own codes and abbreviations and all that. So they didn't look Madeline Hunter, if you know what I mean."

"No one really has that kind of preparation time," sympathized Peter.

"So, anyway, we xerox the whole bunch of them and Ron sends them upstairs and we never hear another word about them--

"Until..." cued Jerry.

Jeannie sighed, "Until one of Marvin's kids mouthed off to him in class, and when Marvin told him to pipe down, the kid said, 'My mother says your lesson plans are a joke. She was over at Al's (the Superintendent) at a party and they were passing them around for laughs.'"

Peter's mouth fell open. "Omigod. What did you ever do?"

David answered. "What could we do? We checked out the kid's story. Jerry was site rep then. He took the issue to Ron. Ron said we should file a grievance -- but how do you file a grievance on something like that? When the association president Dent heard about it, he wanted to take it to the Professional Practices Commission, but he couldn't find a single person who was at the party who was willing to make a statement."

"How long ago was this? Was it only you guys, or did they use everyone's plans?"

"Last year, in October. Just us. Not any of the village schools, not even the middle school or elementary here in town. They collected plans from everyone, but only ours were turned into party favors."

"But why? Why would they do that?"

"We're their scapegoat. Anything goes wrong, they try to pin it on us."

"True, Jerry, plus there are a lot of people out there who really don't like teachers," said Marvin. "There are a bunch of ugly stories of the early days of schooling for people out here."

"But we're down, you see. They won't let us up. There's a real pack dog mentality at work in Ruden. They just wait for you to trip, and then they jump on you and tear you to pieces. Even Ron says that every time he talks to a parent these days, he feels like he should call his lawyer."

"That's terrible," Peter sagged in his seat.

"The worst part as far as I'm concerned," began Jerry, "is that the kids are both infected and affected. They are down on the school, but they are the victims of that attitude just as much as we are."

The room was quiet for a few minutes as the emotions, re-awakened, subsided.

"Speaking of clippings, did you all see this one?" Marvin finally broke the silence. "It's from the Alaska Education News, and it's about the results of the latest statewide assessment."

"Saw it. More bad news." David's usual garrulity failed him.

"I saw it, too. Why 'bad'? I thought it was encouraging," Jerry argued.

"It is, if you read it carefully. But the paper'll just take the part about Native students scoring 30% below non-Native students, and the school board will use that as ammo to argue for more money for the villages and less money for us."

"But we have Native kids here, half our kids are Native kids."

"Maybe so, but from the village perspective Ruden is sin-city, white or mixed-blood, English speaking, and wealthy -- because we have a few big stores, big houses, and cars. That's the mind-set. Even the other teachers in our district, the village teachers, think we have it easy here. Didn't you used to think that way, Peter?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I did. Now I can see the need to do something to change the school board around, shake them up, at least get one or two members to see both sides of the story," said Peter. "Tell me, why is it that we are so hurting for money -- what means does the board use to distribute money away from us? I know how we generate money: the district gets so much per kid. It doesn't matter where the kids are, or what grade."

"That's right," said Jerry. "It's about eleven thousand per student for this district that the state shells out. But we get back a fraction over five thousand per student, and the villages get over thirteen. They do that with a formula that was developed back when they first built the high schools around the district. It was meant to be disproportionate because of the high costs involved in starting up the new schools. Now it just serves to give the village schools every possible extra: travel, visiting artists, computers, breakfast programs, the works. I know of one

village where for five years running every new teacher bought a new set of texts. Here, we can hardly stretch our dollars to cover fixed costs."

"So," concluded Peter, "with as many students as we have, a change in the formula of just a fraction would mean a really significant amount of money."

"You've got it."

"Imagine," Jeannie looked up, "imagine what would happen to our class sizes if we had the same money that the villages were getting. There just isn't that big a difference between Ruden and a village school any more. We're a little bigger. We have some white kids and some Native kids, but I bet if you checked it out, every one of us has more Native kids in our classes than any village teacher -- and that's just half our kids."

Peter thought about his classes. His smallest was sixteen -- about village size, or close. His largest now was thirty-five. In the village, his biggest class had held twelve students.

Clue #3 - "No one left standing"

Wedman was close-mouthed. In the four years in the village, he had never mentioned to anyone outside of the faculty that he had been having problems getting along with one of his colleagues until an interviewer doing research on rural teaching came to the school. In that instance, he weighed the possibilities for repercussions and elected for candid replies. In his second year as a teacher, he was elected site representative ("elected" in small village faculties sometimes means no one else will do the job) and attended a training session held in Ruden. It was there, at the presentation, that he learned a "truth" about his profession that served him in good stead: Stand up for your colleagues.

The point being made by the presenter (from the Alaska Education Association, an affiliate of the National Education Association) was that more damage is done to teachers by teachers than any other group. She offered some examples, several to which many teachers uncomfortably pleaded guilty.

"I know," she said, "that to many teachers, the single most important factor to them in their teaching is student rapport. Without a good rapport, not only is teaching difficult, but also it is no longer fun. Because of that, teachers are good listeners, good sympathetic shoulders-to-cry-on for their students. So, of course, when Bobby comes in complaining about Mr. Podium and his boring lectures, the temptation to sympathize is very great. The truth is, though, that by succumbing to that moment, you tarnish your reputation as one who respects, and you sully the reputation of a colleague and thereby the profession itself. As an alternative, I suggest telling Bobby, 'Whoa, please! Mr. Podium is a professional colleague and a friend of mine. Please do not say anything

derogatory, thank you. I appreciate your understanding and respect you for it.'" She went on: "Another typical situation is when a parent of one of your kids approaches you in the supermarket or at the post office denigrating the classroom style of Ms. Missionary. Try a different type of intervention. Try, for example, 'You should talk to her directly about that. I know, because she is a colleague and a friend, that she would be open to your suggestions. All the teachers I know are eager to improve their techniques. By the way, you should be proud of your daughter because...'"

"You see," she went on, "it is easy to deceive yourself that you are elevating your status by allowing your colleagues to be torn down, leaving you alone at the top. But a little thought about it and you'll see that if everyone does that, no one is left standing."

Wedman took the message to heart, and during the period in which he did in-services around the district (starting when he was in the village and continuing while at Ruden), he experienced over and over again the phenomenon of "unburdening." At nearly every site, teachers and administrators who had collected (like "stamps," point out advocates of transactional analysis) gripes against each other attempted to unburden them on the outsider passing through. Each time, he tried to use the intervention techniques he had learned, and he studiously avoided talking about other teachers except in positive terms. The outcome was that he was highly respected throughout the district by his own colleagues, though any one of them might have found it difficult to put into words what it was about him that they liked. A more tangible result was his election, in October, as site-representative for the high school.

Clue #4 - "And do it"

The local association to which Peter Wedman was elected, the North Riverside Education Association, had been in some disarray, but the recent election of a dynamic, energetic president, Richard Dent, had infused the organization with new purpose. In November, Dent named Wedman to head the newly formed Political Action Committee. Dent's instructions were carte blanche: "Find something that we need to do and do it."

As is common throughout the school districts of Alaska, the principal political entity for the teachers is their association. Roughly comparable to a union, the association performs many of the same functions. It serves as an advisor in management-labor relations, providing a trained negotiator to assist the teachers in the bargaining process. The association provides financial and legal assistance, similar to an insurance policy, in the event that a member teacher is sued or suffers in a case involving teachers' rights. Typical of labor unions around the country, the association provides discounted insurance, financial services, travel discounts, group rates for consumer needs, and consumer guides. Most significantly, though, the associations provide teachers with some unity in the lobbying arena.

Each local association is affiliated with the state association and the national. In the case of a teacher at Ruden, membership in the North Riverside Education Association automatically includes membership in the National Education Association - Alaska, and the N.E.A. itself, headquartered in Washington, D.C. Membership is elective and expensive; for teachers in the N.R.E.A., dues total over six hundred dollars each year. Despite the cost, all but two teachers in the high school were members in the 1984-1985 school year. Those two, a couple, objected to the endorsements made by the N.E.A. in the last Presidential race and chose not to renew their membership. (Because of the significant costs involved in negotiating a contract and communicating with teachers in a district which is the size of N.R.S.D., other members of the faculty resented the couple's decision not to join in dues payment and ostracized them to a degree.)

Affecting the negotiations process are two significant pieces of legislation. The first is a law, passed in the early days of Alaska's statehood, which prohibits teachers from striking. Judged to be a profession of critical importance to the welfare of the state, teaching could not legally be halted as a result of a labor dispute. In the celebrated strike in Anchorage during the sixties, the teachers who struck knew their status and elected to jointly commit civil disobedience to publicize their plight. The second regulation, passed to counterbalance the first, requires school districts and teachers to bargain with each other "in good faith." Legislators felt, when they passed the bill into law, that the requirement to bargain in good faith would be a compelling force. Historically, this has not been the case. In the first few years after the bill was passed, school boards and teachers reached settlements promptly, but as time went on, the lawyers representing the school boards found that the legislation had little behind it. The negotiations process started lengthening, and teachers found themselves working without a contract (operating, in effect, under the old contract) sometimes for a year or more. In the six years prior to Wedman's arrival at Ruden High School, the N.R.E.A. and their bargaining assistant from N.E.A.-Alaska, Steve Parkinson, had been at the table for five of those years. At any given time now, one might reasonably expect one-quarter to one-third of Alaska's teachers to be working without a contract.

The immediate result of the situation as it exists, conceded even by those who oppose higher teacher salaries, is that teachers and their school boards are placed in adversarial roles, and the concept of parents and teachers as partners in education is subverted. Steve Parkinson claims that the problem goes even further: "The administrators in a school district, chiefly the superintendent, must answer to the school board on a yearly basis; that is, each year the superintendent's contract is up for renewal and the board conducts an evaluation of the superintendent's work in the past year. This is somewhat akin to seeking reelection, and -- just as in the political arena the candidate must stop legislating in order to begin campaigning. I see superintendents who spend inordinate amounts of time cultivating their school board relations. Here in North Riverside, for starters, we've got a

superintendent who pays his school board a stipend for every day on the job, every public appearance, every meeting. I'm not talking about per diem (money given in recompense for being away from home) mind you, or travel expenses -- the administration pays all that, too -- I'm talking about a stipend. One of your (N.R.S.D.'s) school board members received over $75,000 in per diem, travel, and pay last year. The entire school board went 'on retreat' to Anchorage for a week. Know what that cost? Plenty."

Board members who are unaccustomed to such amenities as chauffeured vehicles, chartered flights, and catered meals can be influenced unduly by such charms. One retiring board member, in a speech given in Ruden a few days before school commenced said to the assembled teachers, "I want you to know, you've got a real good superintendent. He always made me feel good, always treated me like a human being." Many teachers present shared their feeling that the situation was more pathetic than anything else. From the teachers' point of view, the exploitation of the board was once again highly visible.

In contrast to this was the reception the teachers got from the three school board members who, with Jonathan Koetz, their lawyer, comprised the district's negotiations committee. Luke Willie, Board Member from Alakatat, said in the early going, "You teachers are a dime a dozen. There's plenty more where you come from."

Clue #5 - "The Principal"

Another of those who "unburdened" from time to time, who found Peter Wedman a willing and discreet listener, was the principal of Ruden Central Junior-Senior High School, Ron Sellers. On several occasions, Sellers discussed matters beyond the scope of the classroom, and once he misunderstood the context of one of Wedman's questions. The principal's ensuing remarks revealed a man who cared deeply, but felt powerless. That afternoon in the office, the principal has just concluded his last teacher observation for the fall. His face seemed unusually troubled, and Peter asked him what was wrong.

"'What's wrong?' you ask. What's wrong is everything, that's what's wrong. Let me tell you, though, it wasn't always like this. I used to shop around and hire the best I could get, build my staff, be responsible for getting the best people. Now all that's long gone. They've added an administrator to do all that, a Personnel Director, whose job it is to create application forms, interview applicants, and decide who'll be hired and where they'll work. And then the teacher roulette, as I like to call it, really begins. So and so can't hack it there, so they send him here. Whats-her-name messes up in Nontak, so they give her to me. Whoosy decides village life is too rough, so he asks for Ruden, and the union says I gotta take him. The process has deteriorated to the point where once a year I walk up to Personnel to learn the names of my new faculty

members. Hell, my whole faculty is made up of cast-offs and runaways. And I'm supposed to build a program out of that.

"I end up with three kinds of teachers -- the kind that can't make it anywhere, the kind that can teach but won't because they resent being stuck here for one reason or another, and the kind who can make it anywhere. That last kind -- the real teachers -- that kind never stays more than a year or two. Who can blame 'em?

"Check it out. See if I'm not right. Last year I lost two first-year and two second-year teachers, and three out of that four were the best of my staff. Even that young science teacher I assigned to the junior high wing -- the one who railed under my 'flexible' discipline policy -- was better trained than any of my regulars were when they arrived in town. In my opinion, the common denominator is optimism. The good teachers -- and I define a 'good teacher' as one who keeps the kids so interested in what's happening in the classroom that other problems never materialize -- the good teachers have a 'change-the-world' attitude. They want to see long term improvement, long term changes. Invariably, they volunteer for committee work: curriculum, discipline, staff improvement. They're the mainstay of my activities program as well. But eventually Ruden -- the town, not the school -- sends them running to other districts, other schools.

"The teachers who do stay fall into the other two groups, the incompetent and the trapped. Take David, the staff librarian, for example. He's one of the latter. He had come to Ruden looking primarily, as many did, at the attractive salary schedule. He had remained because he had married a Native woman. When David had arrived, back in 1978, he had been an experienced teacher by comparison. He had done his student teaching in Minnesota, obtained a position as an English teacher in a small Minnesota junior high, and figured he would remain there. Sometime in that first winter, however, Dick Howes, our (N.R.S.D.'s) itinerant interviewer, had given a presentation on Alaskan teaching a la North Riverside School District, and David signed on. It must have seemed to him at the time an adventure -- pure and simple, something he could do for a while and then return home replete with bush Alaska stories, and it began much in that way, with assignment to a small village just outside of Ruden. There his plans foundered. He hated the village life, was bored and lonely, and applied early to come to the larger community, Ruden. In the middle of the winter he began seeing more of Lucy, the village health aide. In the spring before school ended they were married in the village's tiny church, and in the summer they moved to Ruden, a compromise which left Lucy free to return to the village whenever she felt the need, and David free to teach here at the high school avoiding the tedium of the unfamiliar village routines. All might have worked out had David been happy here, but he suffered endlessly. Everything bothered him: the low skills of the kids, the escalating problems of drugs and alcohol, the waste of resources, and most of all the animosity between a few of the white students and some of the Native students. Because Lucy's a Native, he takes that stuff too seriously. There's always going to be some of

that. It used to really bug David that he couldn't solve it by himself. Finally, his temper got nearly uncontrollable, his moods alternating between anger and depression, and he accepted my offer and became our librarian.

"'Trapped' is what I call it, and though a harsh word which seems somehow judgmental, it is appropriate for some. Marvin and Jeannie Thompson, for example, are trapped as well -- though by circumstances more of their own making and engendering less sympathy from the observer. They signed on with N.R.S.D. in the late sixties after they had begun their careers in one of the Northwestern states. They both had outstanding credentials. Marvin had been a 'Teacher of the Year' in science, and Jeannie had earned a reputation as an effective, serious junior high school social studies teacher. Their children had gone on to college, and as Marvin is wont to say, 'The dog had died -- so what else was there to do?' They came north. From the outset they were here at Ruden. With both drawing salaries, and knowing that they would be collecting retirement checks from two states should they put in 'the minimum eight,' they signed a $150,000 mortgage on a large 'new-style' house (meaning not a pre-fab job) in Ruden. Ruden had been booming. A new Public Health Service hospital was being built, work continued on the city renovation project, the new tower at the airport rose against the horizon, and houses and house prices went up overnight. Then Ruden went bust. Or so it seemed. The temporary infusion of jobs and money ceased. Slowly Ruden reverted to its more normal economic pace and population. Marvin and Jeannie were stuck. Their short term plan turned long term, and they had to dig in.

"The Thompsons were not the only teachers snared by the lure of the attractive salaries. Tim Russo eschewed his native Brooklyn and the New York City school system's wages to opt for the 'Alaskan gold.' Beyond what he already owed for school, Tim had borrowed heavily to make the trip, his parents co-signing the loans. When he arrived, the reality of rural Alaskan economics hit him (and his wallet) hard. Ruden's cost of living is second only to the North Slope; yet the teacher salaries are not even tenth in the state. In his first two hours in Ruden, Tim told me that he spent $18.50 for a small pizza, $1.75 for a can of Coke, and over $25.00 in cab fares. He opened the Riverside Gazette to find that he could live in an abandoned freezer van for $225 per month, but if he wanted an apartment, one bedrooms started at $750.00 plus utilities. By the time he recalculated his budget, he realized he would have to teach at least six years here before he would be clear and have the money to move on. The first thing Tim did was to find two other teachers who were in the same boat, and though it was terribly crowded and probably depressingly reminiscent of his student days, they moved into a three bedroom house together. By mid-winter, one of his roommates had thrown in the towel and gone back to California, leaving two of them to foot the bill. Tim, like the Thompsons and David Benson, is trapped.

"I suppose my last category of teacher sounds a little harsh, but let me tell you, it is the most accurate of all: the incompetent teacher.

You've heard the expression 'the system is the solution'? Au contraire, the system is the problem. In my mind, the problem begins with the university system. They won't accept responsibility to act as screening agents, to winnow out the poor teacher candidates. You see, the education department, like any part of an organization, competes for resources with other parts. Should the number of students decrease through attrition, the number of dollars going to the department decreases proportionately. So, in one way at least, it behooves the department to ensure that poor candidates survive and are presented to the state for certification. There, at the state level, is another opportunity to screen teacher applicants, but I can't recall ever hearing of an applicant who had the university's OK yet was denied certification. From certification to employment with the district should be a much more difficult step. 'If only,' I say to myself.

"The whole process is a string of 'if onlys.' If only the district would get rid of Dick Howes as interviewer. Dick was moved to the itinerant interviewer position because he's single and because he's personable and because he likes to talk. Those were good reasons ten years ago when the district had difficulty finding teachers, when the district had to scour the country for applicants, when 'interviews' consisted of talking candidates into trying the Alaskan experience. But now the situation calls for someone with training and skill as an interviewer.

"Once hired, the new teachers are sent out to the villages for a 'trial by fire.' The district office did not know any other way to find out whether the teachers were any good or not. If they last the year, which in the early going of the district many did not, then they are invariably asked to return. Questions of classroom technique, effectiveness, rapport, and overall competency don't arise. For one thing, the principals in charge in many of these villages are just as wet behind the ears as the teachers. Many don't hold certificates as administrators, or they've only had them for a week; in many cases they're 'principal teachers' holding the twin billet by default: they came back for a second year and no one else did. The district has a policy which allows these teachers to work on their admin' tickets [administrator's certificate, a D.O.E. requirement for principals] while they hold down the job. A lot of times it ends up being a case of the blind leading the blind. Upon completion of the second year (technically, on the first day of the third year) teachers have tenure, and once tenured, the teacher's union is on their side. Only commission of a felony can remove a teacher once tenured. That, or careful documentation of the teacher's incompetence. The latter is a long, involved process that might take years, would surely involve lawyers before it was over, and might not succeed anyway. Occasionally, a teacher can be talked into resigning. I've done that twice. Usually, however, once tenured -- that's it.

"The union's position is pretty strong, I have to admit," conceded Ron. "Steve Parkinson, the union's lawyer type, told me once, 'You guys (the administrators) have control over the teacher's development for four

years in the college system, you have control over the teacher's certification, you have control over hiring, you have control over the re-hiring after you've had a year to watch the teacher in action -- and yet you complain about not being able to remove an incompetent teacher. The crime is not that you can't get the teacher out, it's that you've taken seven or eight years to find out that you don't want the poor soul.'

"So you see it is as a consequence of our own internal procedures concerning new teachers, that we (the District) are forced to use Ruden High as a dump for teachers who get into trouble in the villages. Further, the in-district transfer policy gives preference to teachers who have greater time-in-service in the district. As I said to my wife last night, 'Some guy who's been booted from place to place for four years gets in here over the cracker-jack kid who has been working her tail off for the past three years.'"

Sellers shook his head hopelessly, "And my job is to hold it all together."

Wedman thought of Ronnie Sellers' three categories, "the real," "the incompetent," and "the trapped" and wondered where he would end up. Trapped, no. He could always leave. But incompetent? It seemed unlikely, but he could see how weekends like his "lost" one could spread to weeks, months...No. Better to give up teaching than that.

"Am I one of Ron Sellers' 'real teachers'?" he asked. "Is there anything I can do that will change all this?"

PART II: WEDMAN'S STRATEGIES AND SHORT-TERM RESULTS

ACTIONS: IN CLASS

"The first problem," Wedman decided, "is that the E.S.L. students, like Carl, are frustrated and angry about getting lower grades than non-E.S.L. students. They react, as in Carl's case, by beginning to believe they are what some bigots would have them be known as, 'dumb Natives.' They fall victims to racial stereotyping. I need to change my classroom practices so that they compete on an equal footing.

"The second problem," the teacher said to himself, "is that the whole community seems to be down on itself and the school, especially the teachers -- and what's worse -- the kids are infected with some of the same hostile attitudes. The parents don't realize that their kids are the victims when they work against the school. I need to help overturn the invalid myths about this school and to motivate the students so that they will feel differently about the school and themselves."

During the Christmas vacation, Peter Wedman went to a local publishing outfit, which -- in the way of small town coincidences -- was the same company that owned and published the Riverside Gazette, and ordered a small sign to be made. On the first day of school following vacation, he took the newly-engraved plastic plate to school, removed from a door a similar piece of plastic which read "Lounge," and placed the new label, "Faculty Room," in its place.

He instituted several changes in his classroom procedures. First, he attacked the week's vocabulary list. He began by presenting the words and their definitions himself, and then he asked students to attempt to write a sample sentence. He posted some model sentences which showed how nouns, adjectives, adverbs and verbs are typically used. He followed the sentence writing by providing sample sentences for each word which used the names of the class members. Mid-week he started class with an exercise in which students wrote a sample sentence for each word. He went around the room checking sentences and keeping a list of who was using a word correctly. That gave him a list of "experts" to whom he could refer other students. For the end of week quiz, he asked for ten sample sentences and a short definition, but he allowed as much time as the students needed to finish the test. Early finishers worked quietly on the current writing assignment.

With each new writing task, he began by passing out a cover sheet which spelled out exactly how the paper would be evaluated. It was the responsibility of each student to enter the writing goal from the checklist onto the cover sheet. He told his students that he would expect some writing to be done at home, and he announced that students with "noisy brothers and sisters" who had trouble finding quiet places to work could come to his classroom after school for a half hour. He used a date stamp on the cover sheets of those who showed up, and he found coaches cooperative and willing to start practices late or excuse his students for lateness because they knew it was critical to the students' eligibility.

He tried to ascertain which households were supportive of homework and which were not. In some homes, students were being asked to babysit from the moment they got home. In others, laundry and other time-consuming chores were expected to be performed. He offered before school and after school time to these students, and he enlisted the aid of the school's Native language teacher in calling parents when homework was not done. Within a few weeks' time, homework was coming in regularly. He asked his students to get snapshots of each other doing homework, and he sent pictures of some of the kids to the local paper with tag lines like, "Preparing for the day when they will be running the city, Janet Aaron, Chris Carpenter and Tony Allen are studying at home," or "Their parents should be proud. Working together on their homework are John Carl, Lisa Cooke, and Pam Sheffield." He also made posters using the same photos, posting the pictures in the lobbies of the local stores along with samples of the writing. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

Along with the photos, he also began sending "study tips for parents" -- short ideas for improving study habits. He sent them home on N.R.E.A. stationery with the closing "sponsored by the North Riverside Education Association." The tips included the usual instructions, "Be sure your child has a quiet place to work. Is there enough light? Does your child work at the same time each day?"

Reading was a more difficult area. Nowhere did the disparities in English skills seem to loom wider than in reading. His first attempt at using reading logs had failed in the village the year before. He elected to try again, this time beginning with a class in which the students had a "silent lesson": He cut and assembled a small booklet and labeled it "Reading Log." Then, before beginning a reading assignment, he'd ask a relevant personal question or two. ("Have you ever wondered what the most dangerous animal is? What's the most dangerous animal you or someone in your family has hunted?") He followed with a few specific cognitive questions keyed to the reading assignment. The closing question, written after the reading, involved critical evaluation (or some other high order thinking skill). He used two rubber stamps to grade questions, "OK" and "Insufficient Thought," and he circled the room as the students wrote their answers.

There soon came times in the class, however, when he wanted class discussion. Two new procedures ensured that everyone would get a chance to speak, "speaking order" and "polling." Arranging the class in a circle or rectangle, he'd ask a question that would call for discussion: "Your responsibility today is to arrive, as a class, at a rule for telling a good action from an evil action. I will function as your scribe, should you need anything written, and John, as today's moderator, will take the speaking order." The class knew that this meant that they needed to raise their hands (even while another person was speaking) if they wished to speak, that John would take their names (with a nod to let a student know he had written it), and that they would speak in the order the names were taken. John would call on the person who was to speak next only when the present speaker had finished. Peter rotated the job of moderator from

discussion to discussion, making sure everyone got an opportunity to enjoy the role. From time to time, he would "poll" the class. ("Each person please give one character trait that in your opinion Huckleberry possesses -- starting with MaryAnn and going counter-clockwise. Just say 'pass' if you can't think of one.") These two formal speaking arrangements permitted the soft-spoken Native students to share in the discussions, although at first many elected to "pass." To overcome the early reticence, Peter occasionally polled the class members for answers they had written in their reading logs -- answers which he had already seen and knew were sound.

On the walls of the room he hung pictures of Alaskan Native art side by side with works from famous European masters and modern American artists, discarding the ubiquitous punctuation mark posters and the equally common "Learn to read" promotional material. Over his desk he put his credentials and awards. One of his students remarked, "It looks like a doctor's office," but others began to remark that "we're lucky because we have a good teacher." Peter encouraged that kind of thinking with remarks like, "I think you ought to know that you people stack up very well against students in the rest of the state." One of his favorite lines became, "We're already in the top third of the state, we'll be even higher before long."

He even used the line on parents when he met them at the store or the post office. When challenged, he offered the statistics on accreditation as sufficient evidence. "I didn't know that" or "I'd forgotten about that" were frequent replies. Some recalled with great satisfaction their involvement in the difficult process of accreditation.

Each of his English classes was given a section of wall to decorate as they wished with the only constraint being that the pictures or writing fit under the overall title, "The Theme is Excellence." At first, no one brought anything in. He primed the pump, so to speak, by putting up perfect scores on quizzes, articles featuring people winning prizes, and selected writings by the students and famous authors.

Before long, the contributions started: calendars of cars, airplanes and athletes; pictures of irresistible meals; fancy homes; clothing. One of the seniors, a girl named Jeannette Murphy, competed in the statewide academic decathlon and took fifth. He featured clippings from three newspapers, and used the triumph as "proof" that Ruden students were no longer in the top third, but were now fifth in the state. Wedman went on to include Gazette articles about the parents. Word about this got around quickly. One or two parents dropped by after school ostensibly to talk about their child, surreptitiously making sidelong looks for "their article."

Assistance came from an unlooked for corner. David Benson, the librarian, suggested that the students' writing which Peter had been posting all over the school building could be bound by the media center, catalogued for the library, and made a part of the library's collection.

The first student to complete a piece which qualified for inclusion was Bess Jimmy. Benson later told Wedman that he often saw students looking up Bess's work in the card catalog -- including Bess herself. When Peter did a short classroom lesson on the three types of cards in the card catalog, he made sure that among the examples was at least one for her work. Before long, several other pieces joined hers, including one collaborative effort by the junior class. (The work, entitled "Suggestions for Surviving in Junior High School" engendered some light-hearted teasing for Carl Aaron, who -- as the first name alphabetically among the juniors -- was the holder of the coveted card catalog spot.)

ACTIONS: OUTSIDE OF CLASS

Jerry Alexander, an artist as well as a teacher, was tapped early and often to work for Wedman's Political Action Committee. When N.R.E.A. President Dent named Wedman to chair the committee, Wedman's response had been "I didn't know we had one." Kern had replied, "We don't," thereby defining the scope of the job at hand. Getting people to serve proved easier than he had anticipated. After approaching several of his colleagues who litanized, "You know what they (N.R.E.A.) ought to do? They ought to..." and teasingly informing them that "they" had been changed to "we," he found them quite willing to work -- provided he spelled out exactly what needed to be done and he made it clear that others were contributing as well. He started posting "Thank You's" in the faculty room. Jerry was one of the first to receive one for his help.

In charge of "making an N.R.E.A. poster that will make people feel good about teachers," Jerry came up with a gem. It showed a photograph of a Native mother with child in arms superimposed over a classroom full of kids, and the title read, "WE TEACH...the children you love. -- the Teachers of the North Riverside Education Association (N.R.E.A.)" The poster was a hit. People from all over the town called him asking for additional copies "that we can put in our store" or "to send a friend."

Jerry also agreed to assist faculty members who wanted to try a technique advocated by the teacher-turned-lecturer, Harry Wong. Wong, a junior high teacher who garnered national attention for his "high-support" teaching model, suggests that every teacher post credentials, awards, letters of commendation, and other visible signs of academic achievement. Wong argues, "If I don't show how much these diplomas mean to me, how can I convince my students that they are important to them?" Alexander carefully matted, framed, and glassed many. Students later commented that they were surprised to learn how many awards the faculty had won. "We've got some famous teachers here," is how one senior girl put it.

Within a few weeks, Wedman and a small group -- now functioning as the N.R.E.A.'s first Political Action Committee -- decided that it was time for something more than the cosmetic changes. They focused their attention on the "at-large" voting structure of the school board. A little investigation indicated that the structure stemmed from a

combination of "that's how it's always been" and inherited BIA procedures. The at-large structure had been codified, however, into District regulation. The committee discovered that it would take petition, followed by referendum, to change the procedure. Seven months later, in July, in a district-wide election, a new policy was approved: Board members were to be elected on the basis of a regional (geographic) plan, with only two members "at-large." Ruden, because of its size, was to have three members, and in the ensuing election, Ruden residents filled the two at-large seats as well. The Ruden teachers felt they had won a significant victory, and what was even more important from Wedman's standpoint, they had worked as a team to accomplish the goal.

The next problem to be addressed was negotiations. In the past, the adversarial positions of Board and teachers had given rise to inimical feelings. The Board had expressed openly their feeling that experienced teachers were expensive, and that new applicants were easily come by. The teachers had made it clear that they felt the negotiations process was a sham. NEA - Alaska leadership agreed with both sides and sponsored two, pieces of legislation designed to help.

The first, which came to be known as House Bill 130 (HB130) would require binding arbitration in cases where teachers and school boards could not agree on contract terms. The bill was designed to set up a system whereby both sides must agree to abide by a compromise decision made by an outside mediator, to set up a three-member educational labor relations agency (management, labor, the public), and to give classified employees (secretaries, janitors, maintenance, and food workers) the right to organize and bargain. Since the teachers of the N.R.E.A. had not yet settled their contract with the Board of N.R.S.D., the legislation was of considerable interest. NEA - Alaska advantaged themselves of N.R.E.A.'s unsettled contract by calling upon some of the teachers of the association to join the lobbying effort. At the peak of the effort, N.R.E.A. teachers wrote over two hundred letters to key State House and Senate figures.

The bill failed, dying in the State Affairs committee because of the opposition of the committee's chair, Mitch Abood. Abood, a rural Senator, opposed the bill because he feared that it would take away much of the local control given over to the rural districts by the Molly Hootch case. He was quoted as saying, "They're (the school boards) the ones handling the money, and they shouldn't let someone else (a mediator) make their decisions for them."

The second legislative thrust for NEA - Alaska was aimed at the new budget. NEA-A hoped to change the way money was to be allotted to districts by the State Department of Education. They wanted to include a provision that districts who employed experienced (more costly) teachers would receive additional compensation. Although there was no real opposition to the provision, it failed because legislators felt that the control of the budget formula was properly the purview of the Department of Education. Since the DOE was already looking into major changes in the state's funding formulas, why didn't NEA - Alaska address the issue there?

The answer was once again the issue of rural control, and the answer was once again close to home to the teachers of N.R.S.D. and N.R.E.A. The State School Board was chaired that year by none other than Zachary Elias, the chair of N.R.S.D.'s own local school board, and, predictably, he was opposed.

OUTCOMES

As a result of the changes he made in the classroom, a spate of minor confrontations ensued. The first one was over grading. Although Peter had attempted to make his grading system clear at the outset, it was not until the third set of papers were returned to his students that Diane Allison, a top student, voiced complaint.

"I don't get it. In all my other classes, I get the best grades in the class," she spoke to him after class one day. "I worked really, really hard on this story, way harder than anyone else, so how come John gets an A and I get an A and he didn't do half the work I did. Look at the papers, too. His is full of mistakes. It's not fair."

To many teachers, there are few words which carry the sting of "It's not fair." Sometimes the teacher can shrug off the complaint knowing full well that it has no basis and belongs in the category of "face-saving," but other times the accusation is based on what is nothing less than a major philosophical and political debate among educators anyway: What is the purpose of grading? As Peter recalled from "Ed. Phil. 401," the question of evaluation can take you from simple issues of motivation all the way to complicated dialectics of social theory. Despite having reconciled, somewhat, the political implications of assigning grades, Peter frequently had to rethink his position and attempt to improve his understanding. He did not want to become dogmatic, which ironically seemed to occur with him more often when he was not certain of the rectitude of his position than when he was.

In the case of Diane's query, he had anticipated the complaint and was ready.

"First of all, I only evaluated the papers using two criteria: Did you proofread for the specific writing goal you are working on now? And, did you complete the narration of the incident? Both of you succeeded. Granted, John's writing goal seemed easier than yours, but, as you know, it was not so easy for John. As to the amount of work you put into the story, that's you, Diane. What I mean is that you would have worked hard on the story no matter how many points it was worth. That's the kind of person you are. The reward for that work is the pride you should feel for having done a fine job and the feedback you get from others who need your piece."

He made the same speech a few more times, and before long the complaints disappeared.

Other results of his changes were more positive. The quality of the work produced by the students in his classes went up markedly. The achievement of the E.S.L. students matched their peers. A new-felt pride took the slump out of many shoulders, his own included. Following one particularly productive day, Carl Aaron announced in an uncharacteristically loud voice at the end of the period, "This is a good learning class!" and walked out smiling. In the spring of the year, Carl was able to wrestle with the varsity team. It was his first time to be eligible; always English grades had kept him on the bench.

On his first day back the following year, Wedman sought out the guidance counselor and asked for the standardized test scores. The results were terrific, more than he had dared to hope for. He couldn't wait to share them with his colleagues and the parents. He walked quickly down the hall toward the office.

"Have you seen Ron?" he asked the secretary.

"He's in the Faculty Room," she replied without looking up.

* * *

Wedman left the school the following year, "for personal reasons," thus fulfilling Sellers' prophecy concerning "real teachers." The following year, the seniors called him to ask if he would be their graduation speaker.

PART III: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

A. RUDEN AND THE HIGH SCHOOL

Ruden sits on the banks of a wide valley between two mountain ranges. Frozen to a depth of several feet and turned into a local highway for Rudenites in winter, snow machines skim back and forth between the town and the outlying villages. Although situated on permafrost, in spring the tundra surface softens and transportation is restricted to air and water. The town is north of the tree line, which means it must import all of its material -- the bulk of which comes into the city during the summer via barge. The absence of trees also gives the city a raw, exposed look. There are no groves in which to hide rusted, decrepit machinery, no hidden dumps to fill with the ubiquitous 55 gallon petroleum drums. Local punsters ennumerate two seasons, "mud" and "ice."

The population at present has stabilized after decining from a peak of slightly over three thousand; however, its growth seemed sudden to most.

Early going for the first school was rough. Native elders warned against sending children to school. Some claimed that any children sent would die; others maintained that parents should be compensated for the loss of work. In the early 1900's, the Bureau of Indian Affairs assumed responsibility for the education of the Native youth.

The Yukon gold rush infused the young settlement with new economic life briefly, as paddleboats plied the river and mines were dug nearby.

The Sixties, however, ended an era for Ruden. Heretofore, Ruden had been quiet, friendly, and close. Now newspapers across the country were reporting that Ruden was a typically wild, unruly place. Poverty, drownings, drunkenness and suicide brought notoriety. Much of the trouble centered around improved transportation's most notorious effect: the easy procurement of alcohol.

Some people blame drunkenness on culture clash, although Alaskans of all races top the charts nationwide for alcohol abuse. Others speculate that the virtual absence of sugar from the Native diet means alcohol is metabolized differently. Natives themselves say teachers and missionaries either didn't drink or nipped behind closed doors. That meant the only white role models for drinking were binge drinkers like prospectors on a toot.

Alcohol abuse in Ruden was a symptom for underlying problems that have never been completely explained despite numerous attempts at understanding.

To complete the chaos, the traditional relationship between youth and elder was inverted. Prior to the period of heavy acculturation, the elder "knew all the answers" and was a respected figure. As a result of the education provided young people and the newness of a highly technological culture, the young found themselves "the experts" and by virtue of their

ability to speak English, they were thrust into important roles, eclipsing their elders and losing respect for them.

Long years of dissatisfaction with the B.I.A. school in Ruden had led many families to feel they had two choices, either send their children far away to the school in Sitka, Mt. Edgecumbe, or keep them at home, working. Many Ruden residents today recall the real pain felt by families thus separated. Edgecumbe had a reputation for strictness, though, and ultimately that was a plus. The Native parents approved of the absence of drink and social life. When their sons and daughters attended the federal school in Ruden, their lives were subject to the turmoil of Ruden, and the strict control exerted in school focused on other issues, such as the exclusive use of the English language in the classroom. More and more parents wanted an Edgecumbe-like high school in their own communities. In the 1960's, the state offered stipends so that it was easier for high school students from rural areas to attend the schools in larger communities, like Anchorage.

Finally, in the 1970's, the state built a regional high school in Ruden. It cost several million dollars. In the ten year span between 1964 and 1974, the high school enrollment went from 80 to 500. As people became aware of the importance of education, they moved to be closer to this central high school. Stores grew to accommodate the influx, and jobs proliferated.

The high school's decline came with the settlement of a famous lawsuit -- the "Molly Hootch" case. On September 3, 1976, the governor of Alaska signed a consent decree settling the village school lawsuit. As a result, 110 village high schools were constructed in Alaska, many of which were built in the North Riverside School District, headquartered in Ruden.

For the city's high school, the population explosion engendered by the construction meant an increase in funding, necessary to meet increases in the number of students, faculty, and materials. By the time the small high schools were completed, however, the glory days were over. The school district's primary focus was on getting the new, village schools up and running. "Primary focus" translated to money. Ruden's kids and their parents suddenly found themselves having to compete with the rest of the district for funding.

B. EXCERPTS FROM THE PLACE THAT NOBODY LOVES

The seniors in Peter Wedman's college preparatory English class had been working all fall on a large scale writing assignment. Peter had asked them to select people in the community who they felt were representative of "all that Ruden is and can be." They were then to go out into the community, seek out these individuals and interview them, recording their words on cassette. The interview was loosely structured to allow the subjects a great deal of freedom in their responses. The students were told to focus on two issues, the school and the community. The students decided that they would all ask the same four questions on those two issues, so that when the work was assembled there would be a central theme. The four questions were the following:

(1) What makes Ruden special?
(2) What would you choose to change (about the town)?
(3) What do you think of the quality of education students receive at Ruden Central High School?
(4) What would you change (about the school)?

The students were then asked to transcribe the tapes. From the transcriptions, they were to write "portraits" of the community members which, when combined, offered a composite picture of Ruden life. The students chose as a title for their work, The Place That Nobody Loves. Excerpts follow:

> "Whether or not Ruden has an adequate school system depends on what you want for your kids. If you're looking towards some kind of technical career for your kids, then I'd say no. If you're looking towards a general career where your kids can go to college and take some sort of general academic pursuit, then Ruden's fine."
>
> --Max Gustavson, pilot

> "For the most part I like Ruden. It's got a unique mix of people, sort of the melting pot of the area. A good five years ago, though, everyone was calling it 'the armpit.' I never heard anything positive said about Ruden. Now, though, even people who come up from the lower forty-eight to work for us -- I hear them defend Ruden. They take some pride in it."
>
> --Kurt, Store Manager

> "I don't care who wins the game as long as Ruden scores the most points."
>
> --Niles Johnny, kindergarten student

"When I went to school, they made me forget how to think in my language. My mom had to teach me all over again."

--Natalia Carpenter, Health Aide Instructor

"I suggest they cut it (education) to two years. They should spend it getting math, science and social studies out of the way. I'm banging nails, I'm sitting out there banging nails, I don't care. I wanted to learn which end of the board to cut off, you know. And they don't teach you that."

--Tommy Jimmy, "supposedly retired but working all the time"

"The schools. They don't challenge young people enough. Standards aren't high enough. There's not enough pushing of students into college, or helping students know what school is all about, or encouraging them in their efforts to go to college. I think we need a lot more from our school system than we already have."

--Dierdre Mackintosh, community college instructor

"I liked Ruden better in the olden days."

--Alicia, parent and store owner

"I think education is all what you put into it. You cannot get an education out of anything, and it is really up to the student. You have to work at it yourself...One thing that's really on my mind is the violence; we never had violence. As a child growing up, there was not abusive alcohol use like we see today; there were no drugs either. The family homes were very close and we did things as a family. Today, things are so different: The kids are in all kinds of activities and are never home. That's the thing I notice the most. In today's world two parents have to work and that's what happens."

--Tina K., homemaker

"I'm from Guatemala. Guatemala, as far as climate goes, is as opposite of Ruden as one can find. Everything is bright and colorful, from the landscape to people's clothes. It has a warm, tropical climate with high, cool volcanic mountains, and the oceans on both sides are very, very blue, with white beaches.

But the people in Ruden, in general, are the same as in Guatemala: some good, some bad, and all kinds in between."

--Xavier Rodriguez, cab driver

"People need to clean this place up."

--Bill Domenico, clerk (age 36)

"My friends and I, when we were in high school, were more than occasionally in trouble with the principal."

--Bill Sawyer, band teacher

"I ain't an alcoholic, but I do like to drink beer. I don't see why we shouldn't have a liquor store. I think it would be a lot better for a lot of people...Ruden isn't a good place to raise children. There's too much violence. And kids have a good chance to get involved with drugs and alcohol. Me, myself, I hope I don't have to raise a family up here. Probably will though."

--Bob Birdsong, assistant grocery manager

"When I first came here, being white was very hard. The Natives really did not accept us. But as my four years progressed, I have made a lot of Native friends. I have shown them how I behave and how I accept their culture. I do not try to force my own culture on them. You cannot come to a new place and expect to change it to your customs. You have to change to theirs."

--Esther Johnson, junior at R.R.H.S.

"Just recently the new addition to the jail opened up. It's real nice, and once you bring in a prisoner, it takes him a while to get back out. I'm not sure how many cells it has, but the last time I was up there, it was full."

--Jerry Kanektok, officer with the Ruden Police Department

"In my opinion, Ruden is a cool place. We're getting a new renovation which is just making this town look awesome. If you go out on the river and look at it, it looks pretty good. The 'Make Ruden Beautiful' campaign has greatly improved the looks of this town, because when I first came here it was real scummy."

--Willy T., janitor, gas station attendant, cab driver, drug dealer "nothing bad, just grass"

"I hated school. I graduated in '77. I still hate it. I'll never go to college. School is stupid. The teachers are all jerks."

--Brian S., pool hall manager

"I went all my days of school to Ruden. Even when I was in elementary school there was 'the teachers' and there was 'the Ruden people,' and, well, they got along together, some of them did, but the teachers, they would leave so often that they didn't make an impact on the town. When I got to high school, it was newly built, the high school was the central high school. We had a big school and kids from all over the place. Like the first dance, the floor was packed with people. But by the time I was a senior you couldn't get the place packed without the whole town in there. It wasn't a central school, just a city-wide high school. When I graduated, I said, 'I gotta get away from Ruden, it's just the worst place in the world.' I thought this place was disgusting. So I left, but I came back."

Interviewer: "Many people leave Ruden after high school, but you left and returned. Why?"

"A lot of people can't see me coming back here; they don't understand that I'm a part of this place now. I've grown up with everyone here. We stick together when we have to face things. Ruden's a family."

--Jeff Williams, odd jobs

"What do I think of when I think of teachers? I think of that song by -- I forget -- about these two teachers who come here to teach along with their son, Tony. One day Tony comes home saying that he wanted to get married to his girl friend who is a Native. His parents, being prejudiced, don't approve. He runs out and tries to cross the river ice, but the ice breaks and he falls in and drowns. The song ends with the teachers moving back to the lower forty-eight, the girl friend being sad and

lonely, and the people in the village remembering how strong their love for each other was."

--A. J. Purdy, paralegal

"I became a counselor because I wanted to help people solve their problems."

Interviewer: "Do you solve most of their problems?"

"Well, most of them solve'm on their own."

--Mike G., high school counselor

"When I get out of here, I'll never come back to this town."

--Jay H., inmate at Ruden City Jail, from the village of K.

C. MOTIVATION

There are six factors which have a powerful effect on motivation. They are (1) concern, (2) feeling tone, (3) success, (4) knowledge of results, (5) interest, and (6) rewards.

1. Level of Concern - The student's level of concern or anxiety about achieving the learning is another way of saying, "How much does the student care about whether he or she learns?" In the past we believed that stress or concern was undesirable. Now we know that a moderate level of concern is essential to an individual's putting forth effort. The key word here is "moderate." Too high a level of concern interferes with learning; too little concern and the student will have no motivation. What is a moderate amount? It depends on the student and the situation. There is no absolute. What is a moderate amount for one student may be too high for another, causing the latter to become disorganized and anxious. When the level of concern is too high, more energy goes into overcoming the concern than into the learning.

Conversely, a moderate level for one student may be too low for another. The optimum tension varies with each student so that responses to two students in the same learning situation may need to be different. For example, if it is nearly recess or the end of the period and a student is obviously upset because she isn't going to get all of her math problems finished, her level of concern is interfering with her ability to concentrate. The teacher might suggest to this student that she do only half of the problems now and then arrange to meet with her later to discuss how she's doing and when she might complete her assignment. In this same class there might be another student who obviously is not even trying to finish the problems. The teacher might let him know that he will need to stay in a recess or come back after school to complete his assignment.

2. Feeling Tone - It is possible to create certain feelings in learners about particular tasks on which they are focused. These feelings can be pleasant, neutral or unpleasant. Both pleasant and unpleasant feeling tones will motivate learners; however, using the latter can create undesirable side effects. Unpleasant situations may motivate students on a temporary basis, but they may also cause them to completely reject learning tasks or to avoid specific subject areas in the future. Neutral feeling tone is helpful when you decide that this is "not the time" for a learner or group of learners. ("Let's just skip it for now.") Teachers should increase motivation to learn by making school pleasant. If that doesn't work, they may need to move to unpleasant. However, every effort should be made to return to pleasant feelings once students have performed, so they'll complete the task wanting to do it again.

3. Success - This is one of the most powerful motivators teachers can use in helping students become successful. Most of us find success highly addictive. In fact, we seldom continue an activity unless we are successful. Students who drop out of school (or "drop out" while sitting

in a classroom) are often students who for some reason have not experienced success in their learning tasks. Not only does success motivate students to continue with a task, it also contributes to how well they master the learning. The BTES (Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study), while investigating student time on task, found that high success rates were positively related to the amount of time students were on task, and consequently, the amount of learning that took place. In the classrooms where student scores were highest, the success rate averaged 85%. Other studies have shown that success and self-concept are linked as well.

The key to successs is providing learning experiences at the correct level of difficulty -- not too easy nor too difficult. The goal is to make each task moderately difficult, but within reach. By now you have probably become aware of the overlap between the variables of motivation. Raising the level of concern often causes students to work harder and thereby achieve success. Success in turn usually breeds positive feelings which further motivate students.

4. Knowledge of Results - This variable answers the question for students, "How well am I doing?" For years educators have used grades as a major source of feedback. Unfortunately, all too often grades come too late for students to make effective use of them. Furthermore, grades by themselves are non-specific and do not tell students how they can improve their performance. Grades are like throwing darts at a target and being told only whether or not you hit the target. They don't tell you what to do to be successful.

In order for knowledge of results to be an effective motivator, two important qualities must be present. The knowledge of results must be specific and immediate. "Good job!" and "Nice paper!" may make the student feel good but do not help him or her know what to continue doing. Let's say I've written a paper for a professor and it is returned with a "B" and the words "Good paper" written on it. Even though I may be pleased with the "B," I may have no idea why the professor considers it good. I may have only accidentally done what s/he wanted. If there are specific comments on the paper about the organization, writing style or use of figurative language, I now know what to continue or discontinue. In the same manner, we need to let students know specifically how they're doing in order for knowledge of results to work as a motivator. [Note: In the view of this writer, structuring tasks so that students can evaluate themselves as they proceed toward completion is an even more potent technique.]

The more closely spaced a student's performance and the feedback that s/he receives regarding it, the greater the motivation to improve... Knowledge of results is most effective if given while students are working, or as soon as possible after they complete assignments. Let students check their answers with each other or with an answer key. Monitor students while they're working rather than waiting until they have completed their work. Not only is immediate feedback motivating, it increases success by preventing students from making errors. Obviously,

there are times when you need to read and grade. In these instances, knowledge of results will be postponed. However, by close monitoring and by having students grade their own papers more often, you can still find out how students are doing, let them know immediately, and save yourself lots of paper work in the meantime.

5. Interest - We are all motivated to do those things which interest us. There are two components of interest we can use to increase the probability that students will be interested in their learning tasks. One is the use of self and the other is novelty.

Self - "No one is more important to me than me! When I hear my name, I perk up. When you talk about things that involve my hobbies, my family, the music I like or sports in which I am involved, I am more likely to listen." If, as a teacher, you are aware of students' lives and interests, you can use this information to increase motivation. The user of "self" can have a dramatic impact. Many teachers use an interest survey to learn about their students. Others keep a card on each student where they note interests, activities, or preferred learning modes of that person.

Novelty - Just as we are motivated by those things which include some reference to ourselves, we are often motivated by the novel or unique. Some examples of novelty in the classroom are:

a) Varying the class routine
b) Alternating visuals
c) Varying instructional strategies
d) Having students work in pairs, teams, discussion groups, committees
e) Varying the type of product

6. Reward - Rewards or reinforcers are often used as motivators. Rewards can be either extrinsic or intrinsic. Extrinsic rewards (external motivators) range from candy, gold stars, stickers and free time to lunch with the teacher. These are considered extrinsic because they are not inherently related to the learning task or desired behavior.

Intrinsic rewards are those that are in the learning task itself; that is, the task and reward are interrelated. The learner who is intrinsically motivated is not dependent upon any external sources of rewards. The student does not complete a task to get a star or candy. Rather, completion of the task itself is rewarding or motivating. Madeline Hunter points out that intrinsic motivation is more effective than extrinsic because the performance of the task is always there, reinforcing the learner.

On the other hand, there are times when students are not intrinsically motivated, and it is at these times when we may choose to use extrinsic rewards. There is nothing wrong with using them; it is a perfectly

acceptable teaching strategy. The key to using rewards effectively lies in not permitting learners to remain at the extrinsic level, but to move on to intrinsic motivators. Helping students to be successful is one of the best ways to do this. Nothing breeds success, or intrinsic feelings of satisfaction, like success. (Reprinted from "Teachers Teaching Teachers," Pat Wolfe, prepared for/published by Alaska Deptment of Education, Office of Instructional Services, Juneau, Alaska, 1985.)

D. EXCERPTS FROM CHECKLIST OF WRITING SKILLS

Comma of the non-restrictive appositive, phrase or clause.

Comma use with "such as" and parenthetical expressions.

Comma use with quotation.

Comma use with echo question.

Comma use with series.

Comma use with two adjectives.

Comma use with the compound sentence.

Comma with dates.

Comma with parts of a letter.

Semicolon with two closely related independent clauses.

Semicolon with coordinate conjunctions and conjuctive adverbs.

Semicolon with items in a series when appropriate.

Colon with a list.